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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Safety Watchdogs Make Improvements in Mine Safety

Sensitive But Unclassified; Handle Accordingly

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The State Administration for Work Safety (SAWS), Ministry of Labor and Social Security and All-China Federation of Trade Unions have deployed over 50,000 mass safety supervisors in China's coal mines, according to the Deputy Director General of the Mine Safety Department of SAWS. The mass supervisors who are chosen from miners with actual experience digging coal or building mine shafts or tunnels have reported numerous safety problems and helped avoid many accidents, according to the DDG. According to one provincial SAWS official, the program has not proven as useful as anticipated. Whether the program will ever reach its full potential, which is considerable, under the auspices of the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions is doubtful. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Laboff spoke with Yang Qingsheng, Deputy Director General, Mine Safety Supervision Department, State Administration for Coal Mine Safety (SACMS) (Note: SACMS is a part of the State Administration for Work Safety, SAWS) to learn the status of the program announced in 2005 to place 100,000 mass safety supervisors (quntizhong jianduyuan) in China's coal mines. DDG Yang noted that the program was first set forth in a joint circular issued by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, the State Administration for Work Safety and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) in June of 2005. Work on the project began immediately following the issuance of the announcement, and by the end of February 2006, 49,820 of the projected 100,000 safety supervisors had already been deployed in the mines, DDG Yang said.

Only Experienced Miners Qualify as Safety Supervisors

¶3. (U) The selection of the mass safety supervisors has been strictly controlled, DDG Yang asserted. Only workers whose actual duties have been either digging coal or digging or building the mine shafts and tunnels are allowed

to participate in the program. When the actual selection of the safety supervisors is made by the company, a list of their names must be submitted to the local SAWS office, which examines the qualifications of the individuals selected and approves the selection. Once approved, the names remain on file with the local SAWS OFFICE.

Reports Show Inspectors Discover Problems ...

¶4. (U) In general, the safety supervisors are highly motivated, and believe that receiving the certification to do the work is an honor, DDG Yang said. They feel responsibility for doing the work well, and are eager to find the hidden dangers in the mine, and have been effective in doing so. The DDG gave the example of a safety supervisor who works with many migrant workers new to work in the coal mines. Because the migrant workers had no previous experience, the safety supervisor has had to instruct them that the presence of methane in the mine cannot be detected because it is odorless and colorless but nonetheless extremely dangerous.

¶5. (U) Sometimes, because of the lack of training, a mine worker will not listen to the safety supervisor, DDG Yang said; under such circumstances, the safety supervisors are empowered to take action. In one such case, a safety supervisor observed a miner attempting to make repairs to equipment while the electrical power was still on. When the miner refused to heed his warning and continued to make the repairs, the safety supervisor ordered all electrical power at the mine turned off. He was criticized by the miners for taking this step, but the incident resulted in improved understanding.

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¶6. (U) Overall, the numbers of hidden problems discovered by the safety supervisors in the mines have been large, DDG Yang said. The Luan Coal Mine in Shanxi Province, for example, received 4,968 reports from safety supervisors between June and September 2005. The reports addressed all aspects of the mining operation, including digging, transportation and ventilation.

... But Remedyng Problems Is Responsibility of Mine Owners

¶7. (U) When the safety supervisors, in the course of their work, discover a relatively minor problem, they make a record of the problem and pass the information on to the staff operating in the mine. However, when they discover a serious problem, they pass the information directly to mine management. SAWS inspectors, in the course of their formal inspections of the mine, review the reports made by the mass safety supervisors. The Jianglu Coal Mine in Shanxi province has instituted a slight variation on the way the safety supervisors operate. The coal mine stations three senior miners at the mouth of the mine to receive the reports of the mass safety supervisors.

Program Depends on Presence of ACFTU in Mine

¶8. (U)) The system of mass safety supervisors has been set up in those mines where the ACFTU has established a presence. Where the ACFTU has not yet established a presence, the mass safety supervision system cannot be set up, DDG Yang said. The system has also not been established in large companies, such as Shenhua, which are controlled directly by the central government. SAWS is, however, working to get the system set up in these mines as well, DDG Yang said.

SAWS to Further Develop the Program

¶ 9. (U) SAWS believes that the effectiveness of the program can be enhanced over time. DDG Yang will develop an instructional booklet to assure that the safety supervisors get a more thorough understanding of their work. SAWS will also publish a pamphlet describing how the program should be managed by the coal companies, including required training and the additional allowance the safety inspectors should receive. Currently, payment of a stipend to the mass safety inspectors is optional, as provided by the original document governing the program. However, SAWS wants to require that the miner-inspectors receive an additional supplement to their salaries. However, this is difficult because of the regional differences in standards of living and salaries around the country. Currently salary supplements for mass safety inspectors are provided in Shanxi Province, at the rate of 3 rmb, and in Yunnan, at the rate of 10 rmb, for each time a safety inspector enters the mine, said DDG Yang.

¶ 10. (SBU) Comment: Laboff spoke with a SAWS inspector from a province that has already implemented the program who said that the safety supervisors had already proven useful in finding and correcting problems before accidents occur. However, he added, the program is not as useful as SAWS had anticipated that it would be. Whether the program will ever reach its full potential, which is considerable, under the auspices of the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions is doubtful.

Sedney